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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Intesar Duncan, 52, Coralville, Iowa
Louise Duvall
Iowa Department for the Blind, Des Moines, Iowa
3-3-11**

Louise Duvall: The interviewer today is Louise Duvall. The narrator is Intesar Duncan. We are in Des Moines, Iowa and the interview is being conducted at the Iowa Department for the Blind. The date today is March 3, 2011. The

relationship--Intesar and I have known each other professionally for about 30 years. Doesn't that sound terrible? 30 years. (Laughter) This interview is part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness in Iowa. All stories submitted to this project will be part of a History of Blindness collection owned by the Iowa Department for the Blind. By submitting your story you are acknowledging that your story is a gift, which transfers to the Iowa Department for the Blind all legal title and all literary property rights. You will be granting to the Iowa Department for the Blind an unrestricted license to use your recording and all the information which it contains, in any manner the Department for the Blind may wish to use it, for as long as the Department for the Blind wishes to use it. Do you agree to have your story recorded?

Intesar Duncan: Yes.

Duvall: Alright. Would you state your full name, your age and your address?

Duncan: Intesar Duncan, 52 years-old and my address, you mean, just like mailing address?

Duval: Yes, mailing address?

Duncan: It's at P.O. Box 5304, Coralville, Iowa 52241-0304. I will be 53 this July.

Duvall: I see.

Duncan: (Laughter) I had to think.

Duvall: Well, Intesar; that is certainly an interesting first name. Can you tell me where your family is from? Where were you born?

Duncan: Well, my parents originally they are from Palestine. So, my mom and dad from Palestine and they; my mom from Jerusalem and my father from, it's a village called Ramola. Anyhow, they married there and they had my two oldest sisters before they immigrated in 1948, when Jews took over. And, they left their home and everything just, they thought, would be temporarily. And, my father was stayed in Jordan for a little while, and then they found out they could not go back. And, my Father got a job in Bagdad, so they moved to Bagdad and he became a citizen there; and the rest of us family all born in Bagdad. And, there is seven, so there's five more born in Bagdad, seven of us kids. We all became a citizen.

My father, at first, because he was a principal of a school, the school when he was in Palestine; and then he spoke English really well. He went to college and he was very well educated, so at first he was working as a pharmaceutical, because he know the language for medicines and stuff from England. And, but then, when he got the job, when he was in Bagdad, he became a banker. 'Till the end, he was the head of a bank before he retired. He was a banker for a long time.

Duvall: Okay, so you are Iraqi by birth?

Duncan: Yes, I was born, yes, right. And, but when we were kids we always at home since my mom never worked, she

was always stayed home took care of kids and all. She always spoke Palestinian. She never spoke Iraqi. We spoke Iraqi because we went to school and we learned. And, my father, because he went to work; so he spoke Iraqi on the job and spoke Palestinian. But, my mom was just very proud of hers. She would never speak, so we kind of grew up speaking both. You know, there's a different in the accent, you know. It's all Arabic, but there's quite a bit of different in the accent, and in dialect, and stuff like that.

Duvall: I see. That's very good to know.

Duncan: Yeah, in fact my mom, we teased her because she talked everybody came to our door, like the milk man and the gardener, everybody have to speak like my parents, because she wouldn't speak with them any other way. (Laughter) My father is deceased now, and my mom is in this country and that's kind of the sad part. My mom had to immigrate twice, because she had to immigrate out of Iraq during the war and it was another...

Duvall: Was that like the 1990?

Duncan: She, I think, they immigrated during the Gulf War.

Duvall: Gulf War.

Duncan: Yeah in 1993.

Duvall: 1993.

Duncan: And, she has again left flooded out of the country and she lived in Jordan in a refugee camp for quite a while. Just like her first immigration was in terrible condition before we brought them to the country; her and my sister and her family, husband and triplet and four children; they all flooded. They were kind of underground to get out of there, because there was no men can get out of the country. He was kind of underground 'till he got out of there; the father, my brother-in-law.

Duvall: I see.

Duncan: Yeah, she had triplets two years old, and a triplet were new babies, but they all got out.

Duvall: So, what happened to your other...You said there were seven of you all together, five of you born in Iraq.

Duncan: Yeah. Well, my two oldest sisters who were born in Palestine they both in this country.

Duvall: They're in the United States?

Duncan: Aha. One is in Colorado and one is in Connecticut with their families. And, then the next sister, she's still in Jordan with her family. And, then my oldest brother lives in Jordan, and then my youngest brother he lives in Pennsylvania; he's here with his wife and family. And, then my baby sister with her family, she is the one who immigrated last with my mom; she lives in New Jersey and that's where my mom lives with now. And, they all have multiplied; lots of family. (Laughter) Very big family!

Duvall: Very big family, wonderful!

Duncan: My mom has 28 grand kids and 17 great-grandchildren.

Duvall: Oh my. That's wonderful. When did you notice that you didn't see as well as other people thought you ought to see?

Duncan: I could remember that 'till the day because I was in school in elementary and I was learning, you know, learning how to read; and I was fine at first. And, I remember when I, I think I was close to eight years old, and my mom will, like, I will be reading a book and I'll bring the book a little closer to my eye. And, then my mom would get all mad and she would go get the ruler and put it between my eye and the book. I have to be this far, you know, she was just all worried that I shouldn't bring the book closer. And, then, like, sometime when I want to watch TV, I'll bring like a pillow and sit closer to the TV. And, my mom would come and pull my pillow away back. (Laughter) She always says, "That TV will hurt your eyes." So, it was this little struggle. And, I was eight then. I was seeing an eye doctor, which is he was a good friend of my father; that was the nice thing of my father, was a really good friend of his was an eye doctor. And, they thought I was just near-sighted. So, I wore glasses for a while.

And, then when I got to the junior high years, that's when things changed; when I became a teenager, you know. People in their teens, everything changes, you know, the growth changes. So, that's when my vision was changing

was progressively I was losing vision. It was, like, obvious. It was very bad going down, and at that time, my father check with his friend. And, he said there is some doctors coming from, there was many doctors come to visit from England, that he kept recommending one doctor after another for me to see. So, whenever there's a doctor from England come, I got to see. And, I remember they, I got involved in that study where you get to get an excessive amount of Vitamin A to save, you know. They know there's something going on weird, I mean, different. At the time I didn't understand, really, but they knew there was something going on. And so, they used to bring me, I had like imported Vitamin A injection that my mom gave me an injection every night in my leg. I did that for about a year. Of course, my mom feels that my eyes as strong and as good and I still haven't lost, because of that vitamin A she gave me. (Laughter)

Duvall: I see, well.

Duncan: And, also chased me all the time with that fish oil I had to take, you know. And, then always carrot juice, I mean, I hate carrot juice now because I had to drink so much carrot juice. So, it was a lot about this Vitamin A and it was just over, you know, trying to get me...And, I think that was a study in the past, that if you take excessive amount of Vitamin A you could save, but then it got proven it didn't help it.

And, then and I remember it to the day, that whenever there's a doctor came to the country that my father friend recommend him, I have to go there; I have to skip school, I mean, my father have to get permission to take me. It would

be all day deal because you have to wait to get in because a specialty doctor. And, they would dilate my eyes and then I can't see for the rest of the day, and I couldn't study, and I really always been a very good student. And, it makes me so sad that I can't study when I go home in the evening. I had to wait till the next day. It was very annoying to me.

And, I remember one day, oh my god, I never, never forget that. One day I told the doctor that I wanted, I do want another eye drop to stop this, you know, dilation, is there something that can reverse and he said, "Oh yeah." They gave me a prescription, and on the way home my Dad picked it up. Well, they were wrong! That eye drop it did the same affect. So, I got home and I put in, my mom put it in my eye thinking...Oh, I know what it was! I had finals and there we had comprehensive tests, and I really needed to study. I had finals, and I kept putting these eye drops in and my eyes will not, they just kept dilating and dilating. Oh my gosh! And so, because I put so much until they figured out that was wrong, I was, my eyes dilated for days. And, I remember sitting on the floor in the kitchen like in the corner and crying, and can't wait for my Mom to finish doing this. This is so she can read to me, because oh my brother and sister like, "Oh, no go away!" Because I wanted to review, and my mom have to sit and read to me, because I have all these finals; and just waiting for her and waiting for her.

And so, I had day times and numerous time I could remember seeing doctors about, and especially, you know, my parents, you know, just well educated, you know. My oldest sister's a doctor, and so it was very important to them to figure out what's going on with my eyes, and be able

to help me and all that. So, I always dilate; tortured with dilating.

And when I was in school they were very non-understanding. Like, I remember when I have to read in my country, when you read out loud like in certain class in literature, you always standup and you read; you don't just read from your seat. When I stand up to read I would read slowly, because it takes me a while to see because I was losing vision. And, she would just tell me to stop and tell me to go review my reading, and sit down and review my reading. It always embarrassed me big time and I was very, like I said, very responsible student and very...Let's see, what was it, fifth grade I had such a good score that I skipped sixth grade because I had that thing in my country. But, then I start struggling in junior high. And, then I was tall for my class, for my age, so they always want to make me sit way in the back, and I can't see; I want to sit in the front.

15:00

Duncan: And, they did not want me to sit in the front because other kids can't see behind me, so then they end up...And, they wouldn't let me. So, my Father always going to the school to talk to the principal. Then they let me sit on the edge, the side, because other student can't see. It was so many of these embarrassments that, you know, you being a teenager, so hard to be so different. And, then I remember another one. The teacher always wrote the questions on the board, and then you write down the question and then you do the answers, whatever. Well, she would erase the board before I'm done because I was still trying to copy them, and

I, because I'm slow. And, she'd erase them and then I'm not done, and I would ask her and she just get mad at me; it was like no understanding at all. So, my Dad had to go talk to the principal again for the teacher to give me...

Duvall: Extra time.

Duncan: Give me, no, her notes to copy off the paper. She wasn't going to give me extra time; she got to go on with the class, you know. It was all for test. They didn't have anything like...

Duvall: Duplicating machines, photo copiers.

Duncan: No, like what is it called? Like, when I came to this country I went to the resource room. They didn't have any of that stuff. They didn't have any student to be, you know. Now, there are special class you go to the resource room any assist any help; none of that. I mean, anybody needed to. It was my parents, my mom and father, had to go get excuse for me all the time; talk to the principal. They wouldn't pay attention to what I have to say. My dad is always going in to get permission for me for this and that. And, my mom always have to help me reading and write, you know, it was just, it was became very struggle in my junior high years. And, I remember I was always very sad and embarrassed, you know, just put down all the time. Here I was, the very accelerated student, and I was falling behind.

Duvall: What is the cause of your eye problem?

Duncan: Retinitis Pigmentosa.

Duvall: So, did you have night blindness then? Where you couldn't see well to be outside and get around in the dark?

Duncan: That did not really...I did not really notice any of that until I was about 20, 21.

Duvall: I see. What about what they call tunnel vision, where you lose the vision on the side and it comes around until it's like...

Duncan: Like a tunnel.

Duvall: Like a tunnel.

Duncan: I am a unique patient that Dr. Stone says. I don't have tunnel vision, I have field vision; I'm the other way around. This is what I always tell them I said, "Are you sure I have RP?" And he always says, "Yes, you do. You're not the only one with that kind of condition." The most common is the tunnel vision, but I'm the other way around. I have, my center goes like...When I look ahead I have...This is the first thing that went. It was just you'd see like a cloud like just white, but then I have, I was able to see some of the obstacles and the shapes on the side. So, that's how it just kept going from the middle getting cloud in the middle getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger, until everything got really cloudy and what is it.

Duvall: So, that's why you had trouble reading, is that you need to focus in on individual letters.

Duncan: Exactly; the center of my center eye went. Yeah, and I had to turn my head and all this, yeah. And, it was really very difficult, I mean, very difficult going to school there and dealing with the eye condition because nobody understood. There was nobody in my class had it, which I think if somebody was blind probably stayed home. I mean, I don't know. I didn't know anybody blind. I didn't know anybody blind when I was home. You know, there probably no future for them but, you know. My parents, because they well educated, they were try and going to do the best; they going to pull me through school. They going to try everything to work with me and, you know, like my father; like I said, in and out of doctors, my eyes dilated all the time. I was missing tests, missing exams, and they would not make any exception. There was no way they will...If I miss finals I will stay in the summer. I have to take all the classes again. I mean, they were just really strict about things.

Duvall: Wow.

Duncan: And, then in my, what was it, my seventh grade; I think that's what it was. I ended up flunking school. I had three periods that I was not able to pass, and they told me to do them in the summer. I studied all summer and I flunked again, so I have to repeat seventh grade. I mean, it was just becoming so bad. I was getting, you know, older, and my vision going worse and it becoming more difficult for my...They were not accommodating me. And, this kind of became like impossible for my parents to figure out a way how they going to manage me in school; be able to read and write.

And, my sister who lives in Colorado now, her husband was going to University of Iowa. He was on a scholarship. And, they talked to my Father about me coming to the...Oh, this friend of my father, the eye doctor, he told my Dad that he knew exactly what was going on, and he kind of knew about RP. Now, at this point and he said, "There is a treatment for Intesar in this country. She need to go through this test." They wanted me to come here for to diagnose this is what I have; the E.E.G. I have to go special that electro eye graph, retina graph. Completely, that would decide what's going on.

And so, my brother looked into it, University Hospital, and finds out have such a good eye department and they got me a student visa. No, they got me a medical visa to come to this country. It was a 30-days visa and at that time. Let's see, I flunked seventh. I was eighth, so I was 17. I was in ninth grade because I...It's like junior, sophomore or something. So, I remember I had my birthday, 17, in July and then I flew came here in August, the beginning of August. And, I flew all by myself. And, my father had made all these little cards for me to say my name is you say in English; "Please show me the gate." I remember that one, "Please show me the gate;" so I could read and, you know, show them and all that. And, I remember I transferred in Frankfort, you know, and change air. And anyhow, and I flew and I got here. I don't know if I can do that now! (Laughter) I always think how did I do it then, but I was young and brave and strong; but I'll be afraid to do that now.

And, I came to O'Hare Airport. And my parents, oh, my family thought I'm coming here to get a treatment and go back. And oh god, I'm going to cry, because I remember my father at the airport; he was just waving to me and thinking

I'm going to be back. And, it was just very hard, you know, he just, they all thought you going to be okay. You're going to go and going to come back and...Did you have anybody give you interview and cry?

Duvall: Yes. (Laughter)

Duncan: Okay, so I don't feel weird.

Duvall: No, don't feel bad. Did you know you weren't coming back?

Duncan: No.

Duvall: No, you just thought it was going to be the 30 days.

Duncan: Yeah, and then I thought it's, you know, I kept telling my parents, you know, I'm going to have a surgery and come back because, you know. They were, it was, you know, I got to be, you know; when you have a child with a disease and you just feel they become really special, really close to your heart. And, all my brothers and sister think that I was treated as special all my life, especially my younger sister.

Duvall: I see.

Duncan: Yeah, because she always thought, "You were so special." I don't think I was so special. I was just had such a struggle. So, my parents were very, you know. Hey, I was 17 and they just sent me here alone, and it was so much worrying and all that. And, I just thought, oh, I kept telling

my dad, “I’m going to be okay. I’m going to be back; just don’t cry, don’t cry!” And, I remember him; he went all through, so close to say good-bye. They wouldn’t let the whole family, but I just remember him in the glass still waving at me and crying. Anyhow, so then I came and then I had all these appointments, schedules at University Hospital.

Duvall: Your brother-in-law had set those up for you?

Duncan: Yeah. Everything was set up. They needed all that appointments to be set up to get my medical visa.

Duvall: Oh I’ll bet, yes.

Duncan: Had to have everything. And, yeah, I met him at O’Hare and they picked me up. And, they didn’t make me fly to Cedar Rapids because they thought, oh, we just get her from there. There will be another exchange air plane for her, you know. And, they drove and got me, and I went to University. It was Doctor Calder, he was my doctor. He’s from Austria. Very wonderful doctor; very kind and gentle. And, I saw him for two days; a test, after a test, and after an E.G. and the retina all day one day, and all the next half a day. And, I remember I was, like, so scared and they did all these EG tests.

Duvall: They hurt.

Duncan: Yeah, because they, you know, they put these wires.

Duvall: Electrodes.

Duncan: Yes, and they put you, I mean, such a scary thing, you know. There's this metal room, I don't know, I think change now; you lay on this flat bed. They numb your eyes with these metal...and they tape them to the sides of your head, and they bring this big dome very cold metal, and they step out and they close in this big dome flashing blue light. It was just, I think I kept crying, and they kept coming in and this metal will slide out, and she come back and put them in. (Laughter) Just from the fear, you know, being there.

Duvall: Yes.

Duncan: So anyhow, and then the second day that was the horrible news at the time. I remember Dr. Calder came so kindly. I was sitting in the waiting room, and he came down and bend on his knees and said, "You ready to come in my room?" Take me, I remember, 'till now he's such a nice, kind and get on his knees. And, took me to his room and was trying to explain to me, you know.

Duvall: Did you have an interpreter?

Duncan: No, my brother-in-law was with me and my sister.

Duvall: Oh.

Duncan: And, my sister have a degree in pharmacy, I mean, they just they both speak English; and she has two of her children born here. I mean, they live here now. So, that's when he told me everything about RP, and I have all these

questions. And, I remember him telling me how some day I'll become blind and there's no treatment for me. And, I remember asking him, "When?" That was my biggest thing.

Duvall: Sure, will it be tomorrow?

Duncan: Yeah! And I remember he said, "Oh, everybody different; it is very individual." He start telling me a story of this person is that old and still this person is...And I said, "Can you say how long?" And I remember, he say maybe 40. I remember that number, 40. Never forgot that 40, because it's like when I'm 40, I'm going to be blind. Any how he said, "It might move some time and it might stop." Just did not know how Retinitis Pigmentosa; some time it goes fast and then it stops, and then it doesn't change." And, I asked him what can I do for it to help it? And, he told me about that study about Vitamin A, and he told me about the study when they patch one of the eye to see if the other eye also did not work. But, he said, he recommended that I stay for a year so they can see the progress; keep the eye on it and just to see, you know, the progress and be for sure. And, they also like to see me every once a year, because with my eye condition I might develop Glaucoma or cataracts, and that's something they could take care of.

Duvall: Right.

Duncan: So at that point, my brother-in law they got me student visa so I could stay for a whole year. So, it switched around. They were able...

Duvall: So, then you became a student, you went?

Duncan: To high school.

Duvall: You went to high school because you had just turned 17.

Duncan: I was ready to be senior when I was back home, because I came in August. So, was my ready after the doctors says they want me to stay, I was able to get student visa and I started at West High. And, my father worked on getting all my credit translated to; can send all my credit here to see where I still need. And, I only needed at that time, just bunch of English and Government; I had enough credit of everything. Only credit I had to take Government. I had to take Government 1, Government 2. I remember a bunch of English classes. I have enough Math and of Science, everything. Took a while for the stuff to come back, you know, I was going to school here and that's when.

Well, just to go a little bit back, after I heard the news I was just shocked, you know, I was...I remember coming home, and to my sister.

30:00

Duncan: And, I close the door and I thought, "This is it. I want to die." I didn't want to go on anymore. And, I remember, I think, for 24 hours I did not open the door. They got me to open the door and then I opened the door and let them in, but I going on starvation. I didn't eat for a whole week.

Duvall: Oh my.

Duncan: I remember it was just, I just wanted to die and I just was like, "This was it." I didn't want to live on, you know, it was such a big shocking.

Duvall: Well, you came expecting a cure.

Duncan: That's what it was so shocking. Something you've been dealing with for all your teenage [years], you know. And I think, I don't know if you interviewed many RP people, but RP is one of those...I mean, they write articles and stuff about it. It's very psychologically difficult, as the stages of it...It's really hard on the person. I read so many articles about the different stages of psychologically about RP; how they're first in denial and just...So anyhow, I just rather die than being blind, you know, and didn't know any blind people.

And, I think after a week of not eating and getting used to the idea, you know, first you in shock and impulsive, but then I starting over saying you're living. You know, life is okay and I was just...My sister tried everything in her best to make things nice. Looking at my nieces and nephews, and just kind of make me feel gradually. I got out of that feeling and I started eating after a week. I think my brother-in-law, at this time he worked on my student visa, and enrolled me in high school and they tried everything to get me... "Come on, let's take you to school. You're going to go to school, it be wonderful here." And, they bought me some new clothes, I mean, it was just things started looking better in my eye. I would say, "Okay, you're going to be here in America and, you know, its okay." So, that was...And, I kind of backed out

of that idea. And then I started because, you know, it was August. Oh, my god that was wonderful!

Duvall: Really!

Duncan: Aha, it was like day and night. It was, I mean, I started to school; they were so understanding. I mean, I have a guiding counselor who will accommodate, find everything. I mean, it was just, it was unbelievable the way I was treated there, and the way I was treated here. They got me to go to the resource room for the, to read my tests. It was just, it was just wonderful! I can't say enough! I was like, wow! I can do this, I can do that. I mean, I had my resource teacher was reading to me my book, and it was so it was just great. I start dating, I mean, it was no big deal!

Duvall: You hadn't had a date yet when you were in Iraq?

Duncan: Well, I never really had any official date or anything like that. So, I was dating and guys were interested in me, and it was just...And, all the wonderful activities at school, and the wrestling meet and I remember...Oh, what you call that, square dance, in PE. I love square dance in PE. I mean, it was just so many beautiful things. It was just...And Dr., Mr. Plumber; I still remember his name. He was able to get me...In the student visa I could work at school. I wanted to; all the, all of them work. So, I was able to work in the cafeteria. I had classes in the morning, and in the afternoon I went to the cafeteria and I worked, did dishes. I was there all afternoon cleaning the dining. I was happy to make money. And, then I start babysitting. People lived around my sister, you know, the kids I babysat. I start making, it

was just wonderful, you know, instead of my father sending me money all the time. I didn't need him to send me money anymore; I was making my own. Because, you know, I was living with my sister. It was all free and she didn't charge me anything, but I was just living it up, you know. And, I gain 45 pounds from pies. (Laughter)

Duvall: You had not eaten pies before?

Duncan: Never. That was...I love. And I think, part of my sadness until now, I say when I'm happy I don't eat; when I'm sad I eat. It's the other way around; some people are the other way around. When I happy I don't think of, you know, food. But, because I think part of my sadness and depression, it was like finding happiness in food.

Duvall: Right.

Duncan: And, I remember, even those Hostess pies, you know, those cherry and apple. I ate those out of the vending machines; apple pie, pecan pie, oh I love. I never had pies in my life and I kept gaining. And, I went from 115, I think, to 155; that was the most.

Duvall: And, how tall are you?

Duncan: Five four and a half. You know that was huge for me, you know. I was teenager, I just was slender and everything. Anyhow, so I was happy and eating and I went sledding with my, one of my friend was a cheerleader. It was just life was completely different; Christmas party. I remember going caroling at Christmas. It was just very

wonderful life, and then I very nice and then dealing with my blindness was just nothing. I mean, it was so easy. Everybody understood. I was free to...Wonderful. And, I remember that's when Creig Slayton came and visit me.

Duvall: Oh.

Duncan: My resource teacher contacted somebody from...I remember her name was Sarah. And, she came and visited with me, and then she told me about Creig Slayton. And, he came and visited me when I was in school in the resource room.

Duvall: And, did you know why he was blind, Creig Slayton, why he was blind?

Duncan: I know, yeah. He told me that he has the same eye disease. And he, I think, became blind in his college years, which is...That scared me because I thought, oh, you know, because then he said he became total, I think, after his college right? I don't know. But, he told me to tell you this I told him until today he said, "No, I would never done that." I thought when he came in he put his cane in the corner. I said to him, when you came and walked up to me and shook my hand I never knew he was blind.

Duvall: And he never told you?

Duncan: No, he didn't tell me, but after he left Sarah told me that he's blind, and I said, "No way!" So, until today I said to him, I said, "You did not bring your cane with." He said, "No." I said, "I think you put it at the door because I didn't

see your cane.” And he said, “I would never do that. I came in to you with my cane,” but because I’m so stupid I didn’t even notice he had a cane. I mean, I don’t know if I understood what the cane about because he would never do that. He would not just walk into a class room or put the cane by the door.

Duvall: No, he would have used it.

Duncan: Aha, but he just have such a proper...He came up to me, you know. RP, your eyes look the same, and he came up to me and he just kept his voice and shook my hand, and I did not pay attention to that cane at all; didn’t know he was...So anyhow, I was like amazed, like oh, couldn’t believe it. It was just awesome. He was like, very just, he invited me over his house one day. They lived in Coralville, and I got to meet his kids and his wife, and it was like, telling my sister, “The whole family blind, and they got kids.” Well, of course, the daughter was not blind right?

Duvall: No, she was the only one. Yeah.

Duncan: And, I was just impressed, you know. And, then he set for me to bring me...No, that was, I think, after I graduate. He brought me to the Center on a tour, and I don’t know if that was right away. No, I don’t think when I was in high school; after I graduated he came and did that, because then after that I started here.

Duvall: So, you graduated from West High when?

Duncan: In ‘76-77.

Duvall: '76-77, but you said you came here in '80?

Duncan: Oh, yeah that's true. Not right after school.

Duvall: So, what did you do after you graduated, graduated from high school?

Duncan: So, I graduated from high school; and when I was in high school I dated this guy. His name, Mark Duncan; he was the only child to his parents, and he was crazy about me. He even tattoo my name on his arm.

Duvall: Oh my!

Duncan: And, he enrolled in, after he got out of high school, he enrolled right away to the Marine. And so, he was gone and then I finished school but he stayed, I mean, I met his family we were going to be together and all that stuff and but he went to the Marine. He said that's not going to change things. After I graduated I did go home. I did go home but, I mean, I never forget the time, you know, my Dad...I don't know if that was the time, the last time when I came back or the time before but any how, my Dad always cried. I went home for a month and...

Duvall: In 1976.

Duncan: '77. That's right, because my daughter was born 1978 and that was the biggest...Oh, of course, before I went down I saw Dr. Calder in June and he diagnosed, he said, "Yes, you have RP and it's moving hardly any...it's the same

when you first...you're okay; no Glaucoma." And, I mean, everything checked okay, but I'd like to see you every year, and all that. But anyhow, that was done. My visa was finished; school year was done.

Duvall: Oh, that's right you had a student visa.

Duncan: Aha, I have to go home now. So, I went home, but it was the biggest shock. (Laughter) Never forget that; it was so shocking for me because all these like family; not family member, relatives came to see me and asking what was I doing, and all that. And, it was such a different shocking culture. I mean, after I was here for a year. I was just a teenager while my sister and my brother-in-law were, like really, because maybe they felt sorry for me. They give me all the freedom that I could have.

I mean, this guy, Mark Duncan, he has a motorcycle. He used to, every time at lunch we'd go on a motorcycle ride. It was just wonderful! I mean, it was all these things. And, here I go there and all these relatives asking me what was I doing, getting into my private life. It was like, you don't ask me all these questions, you know, just getting irritated. And, they want to know all these things about my eyes, and I was really so embarrassed at the time. And it's, you don't talk to people; they just too much private about what I'm doing, what I'm seeing, you know, all that stuff. And, I was just getting irritated and I was very sad. I wanted to come back. Of course, I'm in love. And, he sends me letter every day; every day I get a letter.

Duvall: Well, your family can't be very happy about that either, can they; that there's an American boy that they've never met.

Duncan: Well, they didn't think that was going to carry on forever. I mean, he was in America, I was here. I mean, they were okay with it for me because it's just like, you know, they didn't think its going to go any far because I'm there; it's like forget, she's not going back. But, I really wanted to come back and I...You're going to think you crazy; I start starving myself again.

Duvall: Oh dear!

Duncan: Well, first of all, it was most of a shock and it was so hard. I got there in July and I just didn't want to eat. I remember I just drink water and ate watermelon. Anything my Mom make, no, I'm not hungry; I just want watermelon. And, just hardly ate anything and I was like very sad. And, I wanted to come back to this country; I just want to come back. And, my father was like, "How can you do that?" "I want to come back." I kept telling my dad, "There's no future here for me. If you love me you'll let me go." And, then my sister...Oh, of course this guy, Mark, he was putting pressure on his parents like, "You got to bring her back." So, they brought me back. They made special visa for me for marriage, marriage visa, and my sister and brother-in-law came, I remember, came in August to visit. Every summer they came, and they convinced my father that this guy has a nice family; that "He really loves her." "There's no future for her here." "Let her go there; there's a future."

45:00

Duncan: All this they convince him for me to come here. So, it was very hard on my parents just to let me marry, you know. Like you said, this man who they never know is American, plus he was in the Marine, you know, in the military. They don't know the kind of future. He's just out of high school, don't have any degree. And, here's my father who all his kids went to college, you know; doctors and pharmacists and geologist and, you know, they didn't think this guy is...They didn't think much of him, but all his backup was, his family is good; his parents good parents that he's the only child. They have lots of money because, you know you married to the family, I mean, it just very important. And, I think because my parents love me so much, they just decided it's the best for me just to let me go. And, I was just miserable there.

Duvall: Do you think you would have married? Would they have found you a husband if you had stayed?

Duncan: The guy who I liked a lot, was my girlfriend brother; when I went back he had told me that he was really so much in love with me, and he missed me, and he was very sad to see me leave again because he was really wanted to propose. But, then I was already so much, had to tell I was involved with Mark. And, I remember him saying, I mean, I remember going out and telling him all about Mark; and he was just telling me he was so sad. He was just listening, listening. He just cared so much and he had told me that and I knew. And, I guess when I was here, my girlfriend had spoke to my sister and everything, I mean, they just thought

I'm going to come back and that would be it. But, I already had my mind on somebody else, and that didn't go anywhere. This guy ended up going to England and he's married a British girl. He lives in England now with his family. Yeah, and we still talk and he's in cloning; he come to this country about cloning all the time.

Duvall: Oh my!

Duncan: Yeah, he's cloning. He always calls me when he comes to this country just talk to me.

Duvall: The road not taken interesting!

Duncan: Yeah, he's in cloning. He always says, "I would like to clone one just like you." (Laughter) Anyhow, so his parents worked on my paper work and that was a really... You would not believe how difficult to get to come here on this marriage, because they feel that American Embassy in Iraq, they think a lot of people want to get out there to come here. And, they say its marriage, but it's a phony. So, I have to really try hard. I have to go to meet with the ambassador. I was in there and they have to call my father-in law, remember that Jim Duncan, they had to talk to him. Actually, they got the parents to talk to them over the phone, to make sure this is not just playing around. They have to talk to the parents. It took quite a while. It was until January before I was able to come back with the right paper work, before they let me. And again, I flew alone and I had lost all that weight.

Duvall: Oh, you were slim and trim again!

Duncan: I know; that was the best part of going back. Yeah I remember my, Mark's mom she's like, "Wow!" Because she remember me being fat, you know, I gain all that weight; so anyhow.

Duvall: So, this is January of 1978.

Duncan: And, he came on a release brief time just so he could marry me. So he came, I remember it was like January 14, whatever, he had two weeks off. We got married and we went to Washington D.C. for our honeymoon. And, I was right there in Jacksonville, North Carolina, you know, stationed right with him.

Duvall: And, you hadn't seen him in six months.

Duncan: Aha, but we wrote all the time; every day in fact. I remember that long, long letter when Elvis Presley passed away. I was just so sad because he was a babe. I mean, I lived a lot of...I was like there, but I was all my head here. My life, I not here thinking of all my friends here, and I didn't want to be there anymore. And, they were so yucky when I went back, you know, just right away I find the struggle the hard difficulties. It's just like all for my marriage; I wanted out of there.

Duvall: Do you think there's any...Is there any services for blind people in Iraq? Is there a library where you could have borrowed books or, I don't know, some place where they would train you for jobs and things?

Duncan: I think probably there is, but I don't know because then I wasn't, I mean, I was...In the beginning I wasn't blind. I didn't know anything about these services. Only blind people I know when I was back home, it's the beggars. It's like when we went downtown and with my sisters to go shopping, and when we went to see my dad at the bank, there will be like these beggars; blind guys standing, you know, begging for money. I mean, only know begging, holding a cane, stick. You know, that was the beggar man, it was a blind man. I never knew because I did not, I mean, when I came here I still have a lot of vision. I mean, when Creig Slayton, when he decided to get me to come to the Department and I liked it; and he had to go check on the hospital, and I was like twenty over two hundred. I just met the deadline.

Duvall: Right.

Duncan: So, I probably, you know, I don't know if I was there blind. I didn't know any about that, but I think probably there is. And, you know, I don't know Arabic Braille or anything like that, because all of that was new to me in this country. And it's all gradually, too. And, then my family, they all left. And, I don't know anybody blind in our family, nobody.

Duvall: So, even though you have what is a genetic disease, nobody that you know of has it?

Duncan: No.

Duvall: And, you say you have a daughter.

Duncan: Two daughters.

Duvall: Two daughters; and they don't show any signs of it either?

Duncan: No. And, they both been tested at birth and their teenage year; and the doctor says that if it didn't show, that it's not going to show up any longer. In fact, my youngest daughter have twenty-twenty vision. My oldest daughter have some stigmatism; she wear glasses, but the youngest have perfect vision. And, I come from a family of seven. Nobody; my grand-kids, all of them get tested. My nieces and nephews, my parents, nobody have it. And, Dr. Stone did say that sometimes they call it genetic jump, or whatever, that could effect, you know. But, I don't have like; I was concerned when my daughter was. But, my daughter doesn't have it. Her kids, they have; my oldest have two sons. They don't have any issue.

Duvall: They don't have it either.

Duncan: No. Maybe it's over; it's done. Yeah, because I came all the way from there, and maybe somebody...So, you know, different. But anyhow, nobody had it, and my family is so big and they couldn't remember back. Like my mom, her father, her mom died young; and her father. So, it could be someone died young before it showed, I don't know. So anyhow, that was...

And, the rest kind of history I got married and I got separated. And, then I came back after I got separated, and that's when Creig Slayton brought me to the training. I went

on the tour, and I remember him showing me his watch. Like, wow! His Braille watch, it was, just loved it. And, then he made sure, like, I was citizen and then I came.

Duvall: So, when did you become a citizen?

Duncan: Five years, I think; but I was alien after three years. See, that's why I was able to come here. So, my paper work was in '78; I came back, so three years, yeah. It was in '81 as soon as I became...because that's, I think I came, that's when I came. I came in January of '81; right at the beginning of '81, that's right.

Duvall: That's when you came to the center?

Duncan: Aha, because I know I was looking into it in the '80s. And, then I came here in January of '81. I remember it was the 27, in the middle of a snow storm I have to move. It was my father-in law, and they all moved me over here.

Duvall: So, were you still married then?

Duncan: Separated.

Duvall: Separated.

Duncan: But have a child. Like I said, I married in January and we went to Washington D.C.; honeymoon, and went to Jacksonville. I got pregnant right off the bat, and then my daughter was born in December that same year; 1978 the end of December, December 20th. And so, I went...And, then I was separated, and I came back and I stayed with my in-

laws for a while, and have a young child, and then I moved out on my own. That's when, I think, Gezwa was three years old. Well, she would be two, right? She was born in '78 to '81, yeah, two and a half. She had just gotten potty trained. That's when I came here and I was able to put her in a preschool, and I lived off campus. I lived on the east side of town.

Duvall: Here in Des Moines?

Duncan: Aha.

Duvall: So, you were, you had your own apartment here in Des Moines? The first time you were in the center, you didn't live in the dorms and stuff?

Duncan: Right, yeah.

Duvall: And, your little girl was in a preschool?

Duncan: Yeah, she started...I lived on East 7th, you know, these few apartment on the north...It's very close to, there's a funeral home there at the corner. It's Grand, Pennsylvania.

Duvall: Oh yeah, that's now the Republican headquarters, but it's a beautiful building. It used to be a funeral home.

Duncan: That's where.

Duvall: So, were you on East Lion?

Duncan: If you go one block north. Is that Lion? There's was bunch of apartments there, and there was also a daycare. And, Alan Ackley lived just before, because he used to give me a ride sometime home, yeah. I sad because I...that sun was in his car all the time, when he took me home. So, I lived in those apartment, when I walk back and forth to school all the time every morning; walk to, you know, come be here. I took Gez to the daycare. It was like a neighborhood center; and I'll take her there and then I will walk to school. And, then I would finish at five, and one of the teacher for preschool, they didn't have any children and she loved Gez; so she took her lots of time if I have activities in the evening. She would just take her after the daycare with her. I remember her name was Charlotte; Charlotte and Tom and her husband worked in that funeral home.

Duvall: Oh, I wonder if that was Hamilton's. There's a Hamilton's on the east side also.

Duncan: Yeah.

Duvall: So, where is your daughter today? Oh, you said you have two.

Duncan: Yeah, she lives in Kansas City.

Duvall: The oldest does?

Duncan: Aha. And, she is the one who used to come here. And, John Taylor used to always carry her on his shoulder and she would rub his bald head. (Laughter) Always so

funny, she thought that was so cute. He always put her on his shoulder. She loved it when he runs around with her. I was able to participate, like on the weekend when we went skiing, I mean, when we did the trips or anything. Charlotte, her teacher, always took her. That's how I was able to do, when we went to Minnesota, went smelt fishing and all that. They were wonderful to take her. They never had children, but they adopted three after that. So, they were really good, supportive; and I was a student from January until August. And, Jim Witte was the Director at the time. And, that's when I wanted to leave, and Jim Witte did not think that's a good idea; he did not think I have the right attitude.

Duvall: You weren't indoctrinated enough, or whatever?

Duncan: I did; I learn my Braille; I did my Home Ec.; I did everything, but I did not accomplish Travel. I never did my, whatever called.

Duvall: Five-two.

Duncan: Five-two. Jim Crawford was my teacher, and I had such a hard time. And I mean, each time I go out I would start crying. I struggle. He would always have to come and get me. I had really hard time; I cheated. It was just; I really had a tough time in travel. And so, I signed up for Ankeny for DMACC to go to community college. When I left here I wanted to really start and I know Jim Witte he let me do it but he said, "You're going to have to be back. You're going to be back. You don't have the right attitude." He didn't think; I said I'll come back because he didn't think

that I was ready. But, I had to leave. I remember him; I remember being in his office.

1:00:00

Duncan: And, he was very unhappy for me to leave. But, I went and enrolled in school. So, I did I went to DMACC, and then it goes on my story.

Duvall: Well, that's alright. So, what were you majoring in and what were you going to become after your DMACC training?

Duncan: I did Liberal Art classes for about a year; and there's another story. And then I met a person, a man. Oh, by that time I was divorced. When I lived in Des Moines my divorce was finalized and everything. And my in-laws always came and took Gez and visit her; they just take.

Duvall: Well, you know, that was their only grandchild.

Duncan: Aha, yeah, they were just wonderful all the time. Every sent her box even when we lived in Minnesota. Anyhow, I met the new guy and I left here to go to...I don't think I finished my DMACC; I only went for one year and I left to go to Minnesota with him, and lived in Savage close to Burnsville, Minnesota. And, was there for, I don't know, a few years. And, my daughter started school there. She went to Catholic school. I think she was in second grade before I left him. That was not a good relationship; it was not a good marriage. My sister, who lives in Colorado, she came to visit me one summer with her kids. And, she did

not approve. She did not think that was healthy. He was verbally abusive, and he liked to drink. And she said, “No, you going to leave!” And so, anyhow, she made a plan with my brother and they came and got me. And, I mean, I told him, “We’re going to separate,” and I left. They loaded everything in a truck, and my sister-in-law came and all that stuff. And, they had a place here for me ready; apartment to live and everything to come back here.

Duvall: To Des Moines?

Duncan: No, I went back to Iowa City.

Duvall: Oh, back to Iowa City. That’s where your sister is.

Duncan: Yeah.

Duvall: But, you kept your Duncan name?

Duncan: Yeah, I kept Duncan because of my oldest daughter. I did that because I just didn’t want her to feel alienated, you know. She’s only...You know what? I think I went to Savage. We lived in Savage and his last name was that. But, I think after the divorce I just went back to Duncan because I at least have the same, like with my daughter.

Duvall: Right.

Duncan: And, then when I was there I went enrolled in Kirkwood Community College. My sister was learning; she was switching into fashion design. And so, every morning I take the bus and go to interstate and meet her, because she

lived in River Heights; really nice homes. And, she pick me up on the way from interstate, and we travel together to Cedar Rapids. And, she would drop me off there and I take...Are you from Iowa City; go to school there?

Duvall: No. I went to school there, yes.

Duncan: Do you know where Mayflower?

Duvall: Yes.

Duncan: That's where I would take the bus to Mayflower. And, she pick me up there just before she gets on interstate because she lived in River Heights; remember, off Dubuque by City Park. So, she would pick me up and then we get on the interstate and we would go to class together. And, if I'm done I wait for her, whatever, and then she brings me back and I take the busses home so she doesn't have to drive all the way. So, she was very supportive for me all, you know, through until I graduate. But, you know, for a while when I married Mark I had; my brother-in-law and my sister had finish school and they had left. I was alone in this country just with Mark, and my divorce was going bad. And, I separated. It was just like my in-laws was the only very wonderful because they know I'm here alone. And, you know, they; I lived with them when I came back here for a while until I got place on my own. Then I was separated because I didn't want to; they knew there was things going wrong between me and Mark.

Duvall: Well, you were young.

Duncan: I was young. I was young, and drugs was an issue. That's why I did it.

Duvall: Oh dear he took drugs?

Duncan: Aha and I was, I mean, you know, these days this is nothing compare. You know, you did marijuana. He did speed but he was...It was difficult for him to, I mean, we had a lot of issues, up and down. And, his friends knew about all of that, but he thought he was going to be all grown up. And, I didn't know what's all that stuff; never been exposed to that garbage. So, I was very...And, then I find out about what happened on, and you know, going on. Anyhow, so they were really supportive of backing me up and everything and tried everything finance, financially and all that. But anyhow, so I went from one relationship from drug abuse to an alcoholic. I just kind of have that personality. I think they call it trying to nurture or take care of people. I think that's, anyhow, so came back and went to school and I studied disabilities program. It used to be called handicap services at community college. I wanted to...I remember my teacher her name Susan. I went to that program because I wanted to help people with disabilities. I wanted to learn how to be a good teacher because I always want to be a teacher. And, I felt I was abused and treated so badly in my country. Nobody have any training to deal with people with disabilities. And I wanted to be, I wanted to be one of those people.

Duvall: Right.

Duncan: And so, that was my big focus I wanted to help, you know, I wanted to learn how to train to give right assistant, you know. And, I am in that field; I did carry on. But anyhow, I went to school and I graduated.

Duvall: From Kirkwood?

Duncan: Aha, finished. I carried some of my liberal art classes that I took from DMACC. And I got pregnant, and I wasn't married; I was just dating a guy and I got pregnant. And, I decided just to keep the baby even I wasn't, you know, I just kind of like the idea of having a family. I was going to deal with it, I don't know, and guess what? Was my oldest daughter was so excited about having a little sister, and all that. She was ten years old; there is eleven years different between them. Yeah, so anyhow, I kept the baby and that is Hannah. And, we moved to a different place, a bigger place. And, when I was going to school I was doing nanny job. I kept...I always worked; always worked since I'm in high school. Like I said, I worked in the cafeteria and I did baby sitting. And, then when I came back with my in-laws, they owned A&Ws in town in Coralville and Iowa City. I worked in A&W's for many, many, many years. I did the cash register, I worked behind the counter, and I worked in the kitchen; so always worked.

And then, let's see, before I came to the Department, when I was separated from my husband before, when Creig Slayton, you know, brought me for eat; when I separated and I worked at university Hospital, at housekeeping department. Oh, that was such a big pressure; such a difficult thing. And, I stop struggling with having my vision. I always hid that and I always didn't admit. That was when I

start noticing the night vision because I remember going out on date. I remember one time, in fact, that guy who I got; Hannah's father, he came to pick me up and, you know, he had this really sporty car. And, when I first came out I couldn't find, I was like way at the front or the back. It was just like two passenger really sporty car. And, he start laughing. He said, "The door over here!" He just thought I was stupid. I never seen like a sport car because I was kind of hiding my...And, this is when I started noticing night blindness. This was time; so kind of gradually I think after the birth of my daughter I lost...The RP start moving again because, you know, it has...

Duvall: Oh, the hormones and things may have caused it to change.

Duncan: Yeah, I remember that because every year I go to the doctor say, "There's some change; there's a big change." Things kind of moved big time, I think.

Duvall: Well, what got you to come back to the Center again?

Duncan: Well, when I start working for...Well, let's see, how that goes...I, let's see. I worked as a nanny and then I start losing more vision, and I contacted the Department and they sent me Home Teachers. I mean, I had Dolores Reisinger came to my home a couple times. And, I was off and on always calling the Department because I kept losing vision, and I felt like I'm becoming illiterate. I need something, you know, I need to learn. And, then Sandy Tigges was my teacher one time. And, she came and she helped me find a

job. I went for an interview and I got a job. I worked at Handi...It's a day care for a lot of children; there's 50 children with disabilities. It's called Handy Care. I work there for a while.

And, let's see, what's the job after that? Anyhow, so and then I got my job. And, my job I work with System Unlimited. It's an agency; it's a big, big agency. And, we serve many, many counties. There's over 300 employees. We serve over 300, I think. I can't really remember how many employee, but we serve we work many counties; Johnson County, Lynn County, Cedar County Washington County Muscatine, so we serve many counties. And so, it is the perfect...My neighbor, they live next to me. There was like a group home that the Counselor there had; and he...I loved those guys. Always when I garden they come and hang out with me and everything. And, he always thought I should really go apply there. And, he put the word for me because he just thought I can relate to these. And, I had a degree in disability, you know, services. So anyhow, so I work and I started there and they were wonderful, accommodating. I mean, I couldn't believe that my supervisor did some of the material on tape for me, so I can study it and could take the test. I mean, they were right off that bat because it's the place for people with disability. They have some staff on board disabled. I mean, you know, they just they know how to accommodate. They knew about my blindness off the bat; did not have to hide anything. That was the first time ever I want to go get a job and I let them know about my eye disease and my blindness. I went forward right with it. And, I think that's why I succeed because I was right in the front that this is...Anyhow, so at

the beginning they have to do some accommodation. And, then I been working there for since '93.

But, as years go by and I lost more vision and I become...large type I can't read, you know. I just felt like I'm becoming illiterate. You know, I can't read or write. And, then I felt like I'm really relying on my husband quite a bit. And, you know, he has Leukemia and he's in remission now. But, a few years back he was escaping the winter. He will go to California in the winter and then I'll be lost. You know, it was just like how it would just be difficult. Well, I took seats for Para-transit to go places a lot. But, also places are close I will walk to. Walked a lot and I got lost many times in snow storms; awful, never forget that.

Duvall: Do you carry a cane?

Duncan: Oh yes.

Duvall: You did.

Duncan: No, no, no. Let's see yes, yes, I...My Hannah was three-years-old, and I'll have to tell you about that. That maybe this is important. I kept hiding my eye disease, you know, like nobody knows about it. And, then this is before Hannah; Gezwa, when I moved back to Iowa City. And, I can't remember when, maybe before I move to Iowa City. Before I move to Des Moines, Gezwa was about two years old and I was...Do you remember that Governor street?

1:15:00

Duvall: Yeah.

Duncan: I was going to the DHS office and I was coming out and I crossed the street and I, let me think, no, that is the one afterward. The first one happened. But no, I remember, that's the first one happened to me.

When I worked in A&W I was going home one day that my in-laws had brought Gezwa to the...And, I was going walk because I lived in Lakeside Apartment, Lakeside Town Houses; and I was walking and Gezwa was in the stroller. And, I did not see the car; it was turning in the medium there, was just turning around. And, I was almost all the way across. When it got close I saw it, its right there; it's like, oh my gosh! And, I tried to hurry up, but she hit me with the wheel with just the right of it. My daughter, the stroller flew up in the air and threw my daughter off, and she was buckled. But it was good thing we were not; we were far enough we did not get under the tire, but we were both hospitalized. And, my daughter have a broken shoulder, broken ankle. I was all bruised up and stitched, and it was just awful. And, she did not walk until she was almost three years old because of that; that is my fir...Okay, that is what made me decide to come to the Department 30 years ago. That is what did it, because I remember the first time; after that happened I said it was the safety of my daughter. So, I came here and then I went back and you know, had hid my blindness and all that stuff.

And, when Hannah was three-years-old, that's when I remember she was three. I was going to the DHS one day and I was coming out of the DHS, and you know how the Government street cars come so quickly on the street. And, I just crossed it because it's got two lanes going one direction. I just crossed and I was in the middle, and this

car came so close behind me that my hair went like this. It just like brushed behind my shoulder and I thought, oh! And, I never seen it. It just hit reality that I'm going to kill myself, and that is the that's when I came home and I contacted...I remember that's when Sandy Tigges came to see me, and she brought me the cane. And, that is when she took me out in the neighborhood because she remember the story when I was so embarrassed. And, I said now Gezwa was going to come from school because was in junior high, and she's going to say, "Mom, what you doing with this?" And Sandy always tells that story. And, Gezwa came from school and she said, "Hi, Mom," and just walked in; didn't care. Didn't care her mom was blind, sleep shade, walking with the cane; was all my anxiety about it.

And, I carried the cane since, but it was very difficult at first. I also try to hide it at the beginning. I mean, when Hannah...I used to take her to dance classes. I will go there early so I can put the cane in a corner and nobody will see, and I would not leave until all the kids leave with their parents, because nobody can see; because it was just so hard at the beginning. People not used to seeing me with the cane. And everybody said, "What happened?" And, you know. But, I was ready to carry the cane because I was...I remember I stop feeling bad because a lot of time the bus drivers, you know, you ask, "What bus is this?" They said, "Can't you read?" Or, "It's right there." And, I have to always explain that, you know. And I have to say, "I can't read," and it sounds like I'm stupid. I can't read and illiterate; not because I can't see. You know, you walk into the counter at Hardees and you say, "Can you please tell me?" "It's up there." You always have to explain and, you know, it's like I felt, like they think I'm either stupid or if I run into

something I'm drunk, or something. So, that what really; I decided, you know, to carry my cane. And, at first was really hard, and I kept asking Sandy, "When can I get used to this cane?" She goes, "It will take a long time." And I kept saying, "Well, tell me when." I'm always very big about knowing a date. She said, "Five years." I said, "Okay." And sure enough it was five years.

Duvall: Was it really? (Laughter)

Duncan: So, that was...And so, then I carried the cane. And, yeah, when I was working for System I did have a cane. That's how I went forward with the job, like I said, I was...Let's see, Hannah was three. Hannah was born in '89, so I was new to carry; no, I did not carry my cane there. I carried my cane after, when I start working for System; it was like two years. I remember Sandy Tigges coming to visit me. Yeah, but I don't think I carried a cane then. She came to visit me and brought me a gift because I just had a new baby. I can't remember exactly; but anyhow, I just carried a cane and it was very, very difficult. I can't remember all the stories. And so, then anyhow, I carried it and carried it. And just recently, I think, with the last five years I lost all my vision, and I relied on the tiniest bit to get around. But then I...

Duvall: You relied on what?

Duncan: I had a tiny bit of field vision left, and that was giving me so much support getting around, even with my cane. And, I became...I can't read or write, but I was still able to get around because if I had still see a little bit, and I

have my cane. I'm able to maneuver it everywhere. But, when I lost even that little bit, I just felt like I was just really becoming a co-dependent on my husband. You know, it just, he have to give me ride everywhere, and like I said, when he went to California I had to really, I just didn't think I could...

Duvall: Get along on your own?

Duncan: Yeah, I didn't think I could take the busses anymore. I used to, you know, and I just gradually; he was giving me rides and then my vision loss. And, then I just became more dependent, afraid to take the busses. I'm afraid of getting lost, and so I start to compare transit and then; but sometime, when I have to work for the walk I tried to walk, and I remember one time I lost in a snow blizzard. It was snowing so heavy; everything. So, there was no traction, no traffic was awful. Ended in a park; took me long time, and that made me really paranoid. So, I am never going to walk anymore. That's it! Anyhow, so it just became...And my mom came to live with us. She lived with us for seven and a half years.

Duvall: Oh really! Were you married to Mike then?

Duncan: Aha. She just moved out last June, no, the June before, to live with my...She lived with...She came in '93. She lived with my brother first for ten years, and then 2000 and was it one; 2001, 2002, I think. She moved in with us and she lived for almost eight years with us. And, then she moved to live with my sister in New Jersey. The whole family thought that would be a better because I have so many family East, and we in the Mid-West, we don't have any

hardly. She be close to the triplet and my great-grandson, my older sister. A bunch of family live there so she could, because she quit traveling. She doesn't want to go anywhere, so.

Duvall: How old is she?

Duncan: She's 83, but she thinks she's a hundred. She doesn't want to go anywhere; she's one of those, "I just want to...You just come and see me." "You just come;" doesn't want to go. So, she wouldn't want to travel. So, they felt she should be in a center location where all the kids are so she could have; she loves family. So, they can all...And my sister, all her kids all live in New York and all live close, so they always gather together; the one with the triplet and the four kids. So anyhow, after my mom felt...And, all along these years, after I lost my vision I always say, "I hate this!" "I hate this!" I feel I'm illiterate. I feel I'm I just didn't like it. You know, I have the personality where I am kind of a leader, and I felt like I can't lead when I when I...

Duvall: Am dependent?

Duncan: Yes! It was just, it just difficult. So when my mom moved out, I mean, when she went; I said, "This is really an opportunity; I really want to come to the Department." And, then one of my clients died, the one I used to work on Thursday. And I decided not to take anybody on. I just decided this is the time to come to the Department because I only...Oh no, I came for the 50th alumni, was it the 50th? Yeah.

Duvall: Yes.

Duncan: And I talked to Sandy. I said, “Sandy I really want to come; can I come as a part time?” She goes, “What do you mean?” I told her about how I want to keep my job and she said, “It’s doable, so whenever you’re ready let us know,” because I didn’t want to come in the winter, no way! (Laughter)

Duvall: Travel, they’d make you go on travel in the snow storms.

Duncan: And I said, I’ll come and I’ll just be here spring and summer and fall. And, I’m leaving in December. And, they said, “Okay.” But, then I figured out if I’m leaving in December I’ll be doing my final route in the winter and here I’m two days and I was putting a lot of pressure on me at first. And, then I decided to slow down and just stay here as long as I need to; to get all my stuff instead of trying to rush out of here like I did before. So, I stayed all winter, and Mark made me travel in the sky walk. He’s been kind. Now he’s sending me out, you know. I love outdoor; I travel for three and a half hours. Today they got me traveling all afternoon. I graduated from Home Ec., so I can do all traveling in afternoon and its wonder...I mean, I really I want to get that power back because I feel behind. Do you know Dewey Cumming?

Duvall: Yes, of course.

Duncan: He came to my house and tried to teach me. He taught me DOS. And, as soon as he taught me DOS everything switch to JAWS; so I feel right behind. I couldn't use my computer, so it just. But now, I'm so excited that I could work, do computer. And, my husband has been very supportive. He types up all my progress reports. I dictate them all on tapes and he types them all. So, he takes me everywhere, you know.

Duvall: But, this way you'll be able to do those things yourself.

Duncan: Yeah, and I want to be able to feel...Like, I wanted to go see my Mom in New Jersey, and I want to fly alone. And I'm going to fly alone, you know. I mean, because, you know, my family will pay my ticket and always they tell me to come. You know, Michael doesn't want to go anywhere. But I...One, that's a lot of my goals. I can travel. I'm going to go to the convention this summer.

Duvall: And, where will that be?

Duncan: Michael's not going. It's going to be in Orlando.

Duvall: Florida, oh okay.

Duncan: And, I volunteered to do some. I told Sandy today I'm going to work at some tables and stuff. So, I'm going to be on my own to go to the meetings and stuff, finding, because I'm going to have my own schedule. So, I'm not going to have to rely on; so I'm going to push myself to feel, like I said, just believing in myself; this is my biggest thing.

Duvall: Right.

Duncan: So, that's my story and I'm sticking to it! (Laughter)

Duvall: Wonderful!

Duncan: It's been very long, difficult, but it's okay now. You know, it's now I do believe that its blindness becoming; it's nothing but nuisance, you know. And, I can accomplish anything I want, but it's just inconvenient. And, I miss seeing sometimes. But sometime it hit me, like when there's a rainbow up in the sky, and everybody say, "Oh, look at the beautiful rainbow," and I almost ready to cry.

Duvall: Yes. Well, you remember what they look like.

Duncan: Yeah, and that's what made me sad. Makes me want to cry! And then that Dancing with the Stars on TV; I love dancing and I used to watch it, but I can't watch it anymore because these people do such wonderful moves and I can't tell what they doing. And, nobody can just keep, you know, telling me all that stuff. So, it just kind of make me frustrated; little things like that. I have to look at the other good things and just remember that.

Duvall: You know that Lisa owns a dance studio.

Duncan: Yes.

Duvall: Okay, I was thinking she is a great fan of dancing with the Stars.

Duncan: It's going to start in three weeks.

Duvall: Yes.

Duncan: My husband and I took ballroom dancing for many years.

Duvall: Oh really, wonderful!

Duncan: So we did; we did. And, he likes dance and I like dance, and we took ballroom dance. We did level one and two and three, all the way through six. And, we start doing them over. We get them through Kirkwood Community. So, that's why we watch the program. And, they do all these wonderful things, and it's like, what are they doing? I want to watch them because it's so, you know, it's so beautiful, so graceful.

1:30:00

Duncan: I mean, I dance and I took belly dancing. I did it all hands on, I mean, but it just...It's watching dance and, like, you know, just the beauty of it. It's different than do it things with hand on. But, I always have to remember that lot of people have something. Its just blindness; you carrying the cane; it just looks so obvious. You know, it's not like I'm lesser from a different god or less. You just have to believe that. Have to feel about myself. I guess that's one of my big issue. I don't like to feel, I like to feel equal.

Duvall: Sure!

Duncan: Yeah, that's why I get irritated from when I'm in a restaurant. Like, I share whatever. If they talk to my husband, he knows better. Now he just walks away because he know he's going to get in trouble. (Laughter)

Duvall: Well, I have...I'm getting down to the end of the questions here, but what would you tell a blind child today on how to achieve and how to be successful?

Duncan: I really, first, I really think it's so important to learn Braille because it opens all the doors. And I mean, I see these young ones who learn Braille from young childhood, you know, it's, they just normal. They can read fast. It wonderful! It just opens so many doors! Take on the blind skills. Carry the cane and everything like that, because I know it's so difficult when you're young. And, to try to believe that, you know, you need all these. And, let's see, what did you say how to, change, how to?

Duvall: What would you tell a blind child how to achieve and be successful?

Duncan: Aha. Well, don't feel that you are lesser than anybody else, and learn all the skills, everything you can. And then, and you might have to fight for some things. You have to might, you know, fight; I want this! And, I want the Braille, and I want all this to achieve. Because a lot of time the world, the sighted world out there, don't believe that we should be acting like blind people. We should always be like sighted people. And, then go after your dreams! I mean, you know, it just really become...Blindness, if you work on

yourself and you do everything, you should be able to do anything you want to. I always says I can do anything I want, except fly a plane or drive a car. It really do, if you believe and you learn the skills, and it become just a nuisance, inconvenient thing. But, you see all these wonderfully successful blind people, anything they want. I just even know there was a doctor being blind.

Duvall: Yes. We had a student go through Notre Dame, college or University, and he took Anatomy classes and all kinds of things that, I certainly didn't have any idea how he was going to cope; but that was his area his interest and he figured it out.

Duncan: Yeah, there's so many possible ways to figure, I mean, any like, I run into some many difficulty things, but I bring them to my supervisor. I talk to the Department, whatever, and we find we can work any obstacles. Like, I come on to the job. So, really blindness should not change; should not make you, should go on with your dreams and be whatever you want to be. A lawyer, you know. You just have to be strong. And you might have obstacles, and just have to be a fighter; but you can be whatever. Achieve all your dreams, and blindness become just a nuisance. I know so many people who are blind and diabetic and they always say blindness is nothing; it's the diabetes that I can't, it brings me down. It makes, they hate being diabetic because it slows them down. You know, they have and diet, but the blindness, nothing. They don't care they blind. It just didn't stop them, didn't slow them down doing anything. It shouldn't, but the diabetes. So, that's what I always heard from others. And also, another friend point out to me how

you could, blind people can see the inner beauty that sighted people don't see. We run into this couple times, me and my friend. I was telling him about how this person I thought she was such a nice and sweet and everything, and then later on you know to find, like, she's, you know, one leg was shorter than the other. And, she wasn't...she's def...I mean, you know, and I didn't see any of that. I mean, I didn't. I just thought of her such a, you know, a beautiful person. And I think Cheryl always says, she said, "That's a gift we have that sighted people over." "They don't see that, because they too much of judging people by how they look."

Duvall: There is that! There certainly is. Well, thank you for your time and your stories. Do you have anything else you want to ad?

Duncan: No.

Duvall: Well, I would like to have you spell your name.

Duncan: Sure. I-n-t-e-s-a-r, and Duncan D-u-n-c-a-n.

Duvall: And, then your daughters' names, both of them.

Duncan: My oldest name Gezwa, G-e-z-w-a and my youngest is Hannah H-a-n-n-a-h.

Duvall: Okay.

(End of Recording)

1:43:35

Beverly Tietz
5-17-11